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Lincoln Monument Dedication Poem

By JAMES JUDSON LORD

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By JAMES JUDSON LORD

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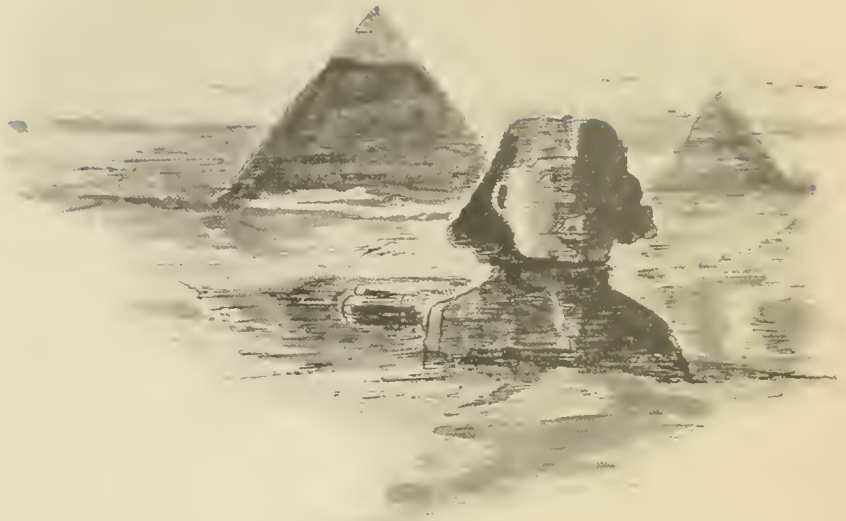
We build not here a temple or a shrine,
Nor hero-fane to demigods divine;
Nor to the clouds a superstructure rear
For man's ambition or for servile fear.
Not to the Dust, but to the Deeds alone
A grateful people raise th' historic stone;
For where a patriot lived, or hero fell,
The daisied turf would mark the spot as well.



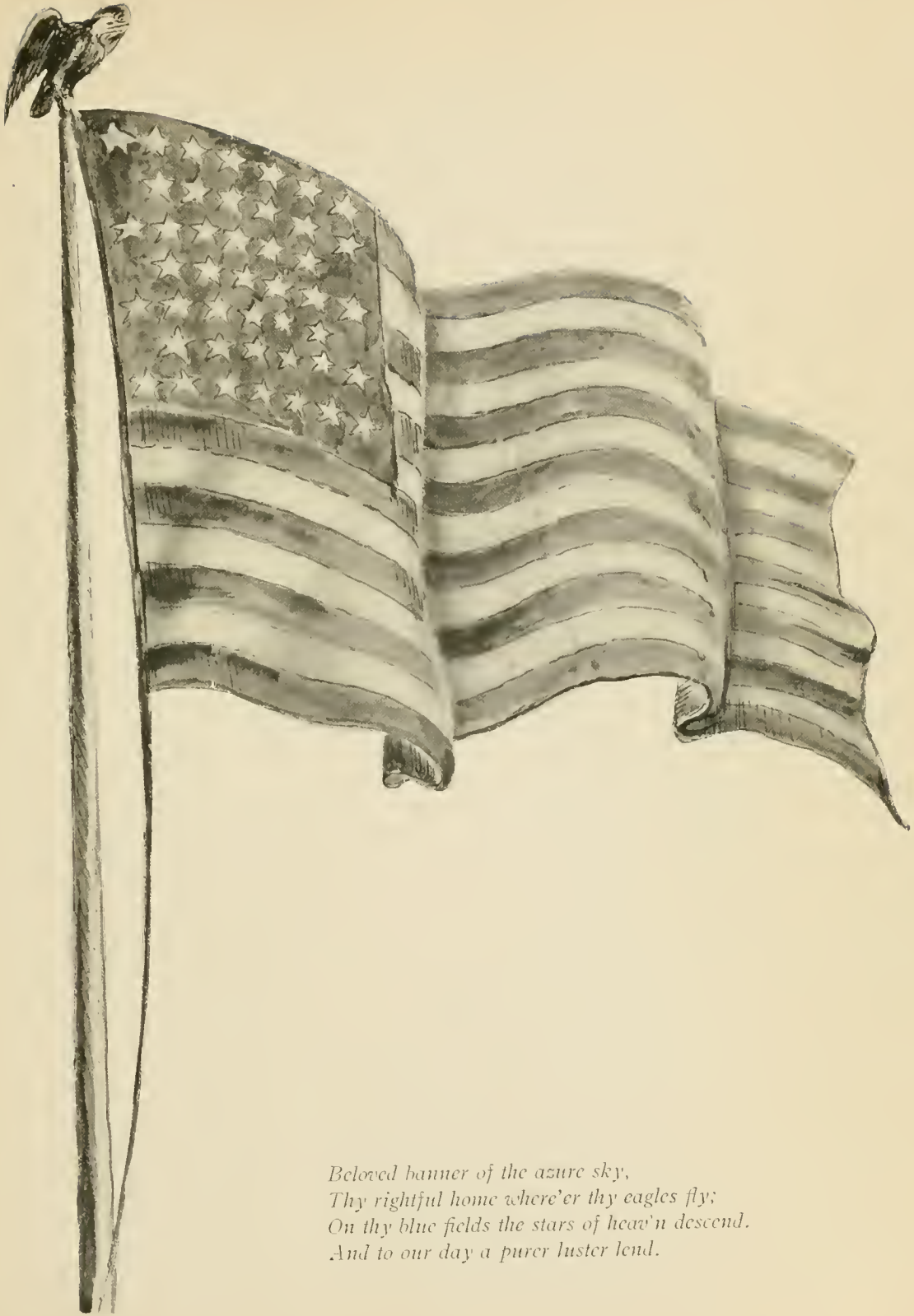
What though the Pyramids, with apex high,
Like Alpine peaks cleave Egypt's rainless sky,
And cast grim shadows o'er a desert land
Forever blighted by oppression's hand?
No patriot zeal their deep foundations laid —
No freeman's hand their darken'd chambers made
No public weal inspired the heart with love,
To see their summits tow'ring high above.

The ruling Pharaoh, proud and gory-stained,
With vain ambitions never yet attained;—
With brow enclouded as his marble throne,
And heart unyielding as the building stone;—
Sought with the scourge to make mankind his slaves,
And heaven's free sunlight darker than their graves.
His but to will, and theirs to yield and feel,
Like vermin'd dust beneath his iron heel;—
Denies all mercy, and all right offends,
Till on his head th' avenging Plague descends.

Historic justice bids the nations know
That through each land of slaves a Nile of blood shall flow:
And Vendome Columns, on a people thrust,
Are, by the people, level'd with the dust.

Nor stone, nor bronze, can fit memorials yield
For deeds of valor on the bloody field,
'Neath war's dark clouds the sturdy volunteer,
By freedom taught his country to revere,
Bids home and friends a hasty, sad adieu,
And treads where dangers all his steps pursue;
Finds cold and famine on his dauntless way,
And with mute patience brooks the long delay,
Or hears the trumpet, or the thrilling drum
Peal the long roll that calls: "They come! they come!"
Then to the front with battling hosts he flies,
And lives to triumph, or for freedom dies.

Thund'ring amain along the rocky strand,
The Ocean claims her honors with the Land
Loud on the gale she chimes the wild refrain,
Or with low murmur wails her heroes slain!
In gory hulks, with splinter'd mast and spar,
Rocks on her stormy breast the valiant Tar:
Lash'd to the mast he gives the high command.
Or midst the fight, sinks with the Cumberland.

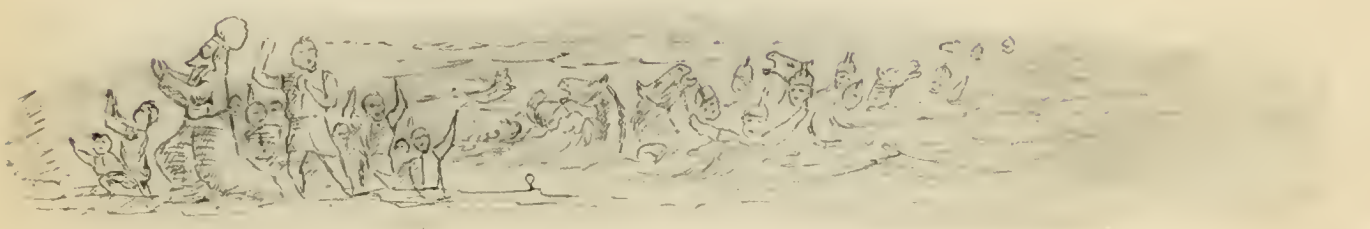


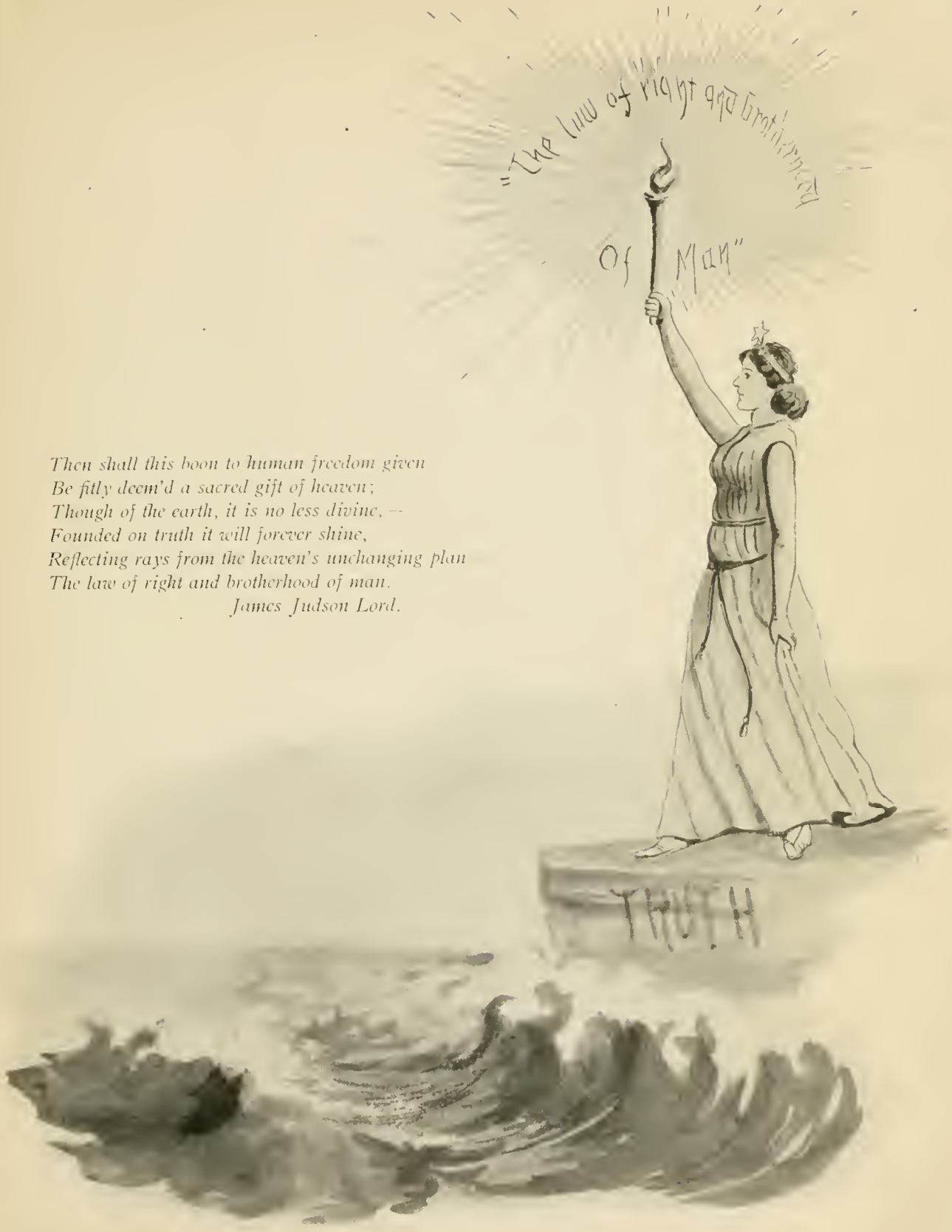
Beloved banner of the azure sky,
Thy rightful home where'er thy eagles fly;
On thy blue fields the stars of heav'n descend.
And to our day a purer luster lend.

O, Righteous God! Who guard'st the right alway,
And bade Thy peace to come, "and come to stay:"
And while war's deluge fill'd the land with blood,
With bow of promise arch'd the crimson flood,
From fratricidal strife our banner screen,
And let it float henceforth in skies serene.

Yet cunning art shall here her triumphs bring,
And laurel'd bards their choicest anthems sing.
Here, honor'd age shall bare its wintry brow,
And youth to freedom make a Spartan vow.
Here, ripen'd manhood from its walks profound,
Shall come and halt, as if on hallow'd ground.
Here shall the urn with fragrant wreaths be drest,
By tender hands the flow'ry tributes prest;
And wending westward, from oppressions far,
Shall pilgrims come led by our freedom-star;
While bending lowly, o'er friendly pall,
The silent tear from ebon cheeks shall fall.

Sterile and vain the tributes which we pay
It is the Past that consecrates to-day
The spot where rests one of the noble few
Who saw the right, and dared the right to do.
True to himself and to his fellow men,
With patient hand he moved the potent pen,
Whose inky stream did, like the Red sea's flow,
Such bondage break and such a host o'erthrow!
The simple parchment on its fleeting page
Bespeaks the import of the better age,—
When man, for man, no more shall forge the chain,
Nor armies tread the shore, nor navies plow the main.





Then shall this boon to human freedom given
Be fitly deem'd a sacred gift of heaven;
Though of the earth, it is no less divine,—
Founded on truth it will forever shine,
Reflecting rays from the heaven's unchanging plan
The law of right and brotherhood of man.

James Judson Lord.

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